

## WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An image forming apparatus comprising:  
a scanner unit for obtaining text data by scanning a document;  
5 an external storage device for, if the text data obtained by said scanner unit are confidential, saving the confidential text data on an attachable/detachable medium;  
an internal storage device for temporarily saving the confidential text data;  
10 a device for deleting the confidential text data after a first predetermined time has elapsed since a point of time when the confidential text data were temporarily saved on said internal storage device; and  
a control unit for controlling the whole of said image  
15 forming apparatus.
2. An image forming apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said external storage device saves the confidential text data given from said scanner unit, or saves the confidential text  
20 data stored on said internal storage device and transferred to said external storage device itself, and is controlled so that the confidential text data on said internal storage device are erased after a completion of the data transfer.
- 25 3. An image forming apparatus according to claim 2, wherein when said external storage device saves on said storage medium the confidential text data transferred from said scanner unit or from said internal storage device to said external storage device itself, contents stored on said storage medium are erased  
30 after a second predetermined time has elapsed.
4. An image forming apparatus according to claim 3, wherein said control unit, after a completion of saving the confidential text data on said storage medium, output a piece of information  
35 for prompting a user to pull out said storage medium.
5. An image forming apparatus according to claim 4, wherein

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the information for prompting the user to pull out said storage medium is at least one of a message displayed on a screen and a voice (sound) alarm.

5           6. An image forming apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising an operation unit for specifying, if the document to be deal with exhibits a high confidentiality, a confidential document mode.

10           7. An image forming apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said control unit, when temporarily saving the confidential text data on said internal storage device, executes an authentication process of comparing a user name and a password inputted with a user name and a password registered beforehand.

15           8. An image forming apparatus comprising:  
          a scanner unit for obtaining text data by scanning a document;  
          an external storage device for, if the text data obtained  
20 by said scanner unit are confidential, saving the confidential text data on an attachable/detachable medium;  
          an internal storage device for temporarily saving the confidential text data;  
          a password registration module for registering a user name  
25 and a password; and  
          a control unit for temporarily saving the confidential text data on said internal storage device, permitting a transfer of the temporarily saved confidential text data to said external storage device on condition that the password inputted by a user  
30 is coincident with a password registered in said password registration module, erasing contents stored on said internal storage device after a first predetermined time has elapsed since the confidential text data were temporarily saved, and erasing contents stored on said medium if said medium is not pulled out  
35 within a second predetermined time after transferring the confidential text data.

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9. An image forming apparatus according to claim 8, wherein said control unit, if unused capacity of said medium becomes insufficient when transferring the confidential text data to said external storage device from said internal storage device, prevents the confidential text data from being erased by extending, even if a remaining time of the first predetermined time is small, this period of remaining time.

10. An image forming apparatus according to claim 9, wherein said control unit further emits a voice (sound) signal for prompting the user to pull out said medium from a point of time when completing the transfer of the confidential text data temporarily stored on said internal storage device to said external storage device.

11. A text data handling method in an image forming apparatus, comprising:

a step of obtaining text data by scanning a document with a scanner unit;

a step of, if the text data obtained by said scanner unit are confidential, temporarily storing the confidential text data on an internal storage device;

a step of transferring and saving an attachable/detachable medium with the confidential text data stored on said internal storage device through said external storage device;

a step of erasing contents stored on said internal storage device after transferring and saving the confidential text data to and on said medium; and

a step of executing a process for prompting a user to pull out said medium out of said external storage device.

12. A text data handling method in an image forming apparatus according to claim 11, further comprising a step of erasing the confidential text data temporarily stored on said internal storage device after a first predetermined time has elapsed since the confidential text data were stored.

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13. A text data handling method in an image forming apparatus according to claim 12, further comprising a step of erasing the confidential text data stored on said medium after a second predetermined time has elapsed since the confidential text data were transferred to and saved on said medium from said scanner unit or said internal storage device.

14. A text data handling method in an image forming apparatus according to claim 11, wherein said step of executing the process for prompting the user to pull out said medium from said external storage device, involves at least one of displaying a message on a screen and giving a voice (sound) alarm.

15. A text data handling method in an image forming apparatus according to claim 11, wherein an operation unit specifies, if the document to be deal with exhibits a high confidentiality, a confidential document mode.

16. A text data handling method in an image forming apparatus according to claim 15, further comprising a step of executing an authentication process of comparing, if the confidential document mode is specified and when temporarily saving the confidential text data on said internal storage device, a user name and a password inputted with a user name and a password registered beforehand.